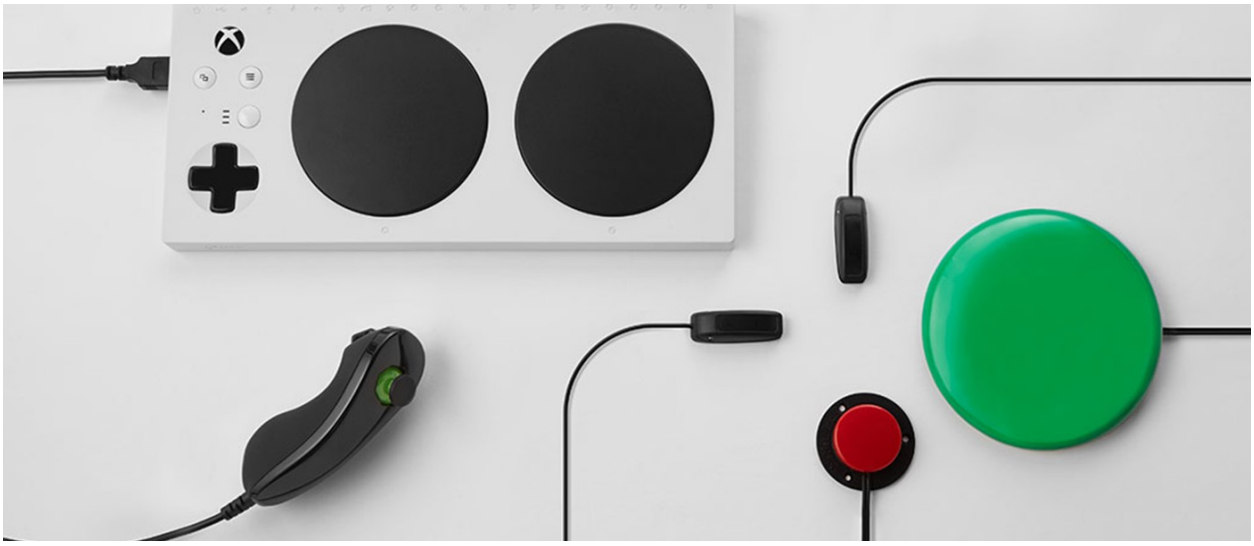


Disability in gaming

Community Fifthpaw Oct 15, 2020

Written by CerebralPaul. Check out his Ambassador of the Month article!

When I started gaming as a young teen there was no online gaming, only local and maybe split screen in a few games. Our primary source of these games was in the arcades and places that had a few games— if you were lucky you had one of the few early home gaming systems.

Whenever I would play these games with others in public or in a home, they could immediately see my limitations and any issues I was having. As gaming progressed, it has shifted into a greater online community. But as a person whose dexterity and reaction times are greatly affected by my lifelong disability it can be very intimidating and embarrassing to join others online.

In the early days of online gaming I primarily avoided it because I knew I couldn't keep up. In 2006 I picked up a popular FPS and started playing online with a group of friends from around the country. They knew me, they knew my situation, they were supportive and encouraging. I learned very quickly that the random gamer on the other hand would be quick to point out your shortcomings after a match.

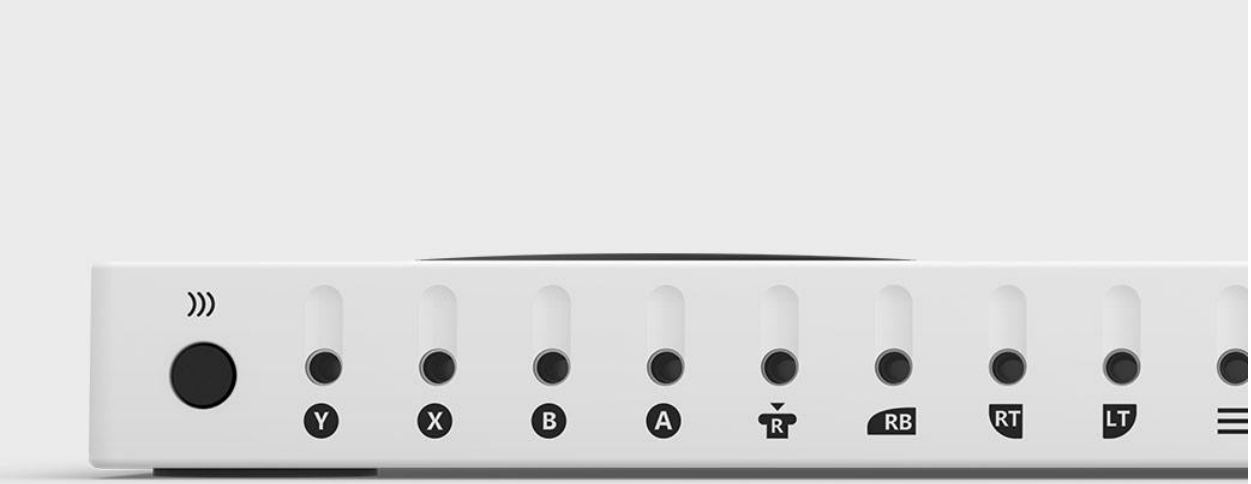
After a while it got to the point where I wouldn't play online at all. Being repeatedly told how bad I was and that I had no business playing games made me question my own self-worth. When those doing the insulting are 12 and 13 year olds, it can make you miserable, and at the time enforcement for such things was lacking. Some communities became extremely toxic, and still are.

Enter 2018: At the urging of a friend I picked up a squad based FPS so we could play together— I joined him and his friends playing and enjoying the game. I am alright at the game. It took me a while to find my style, which characters, gadgets, and guns worked for me. If we had strangers in the party, they would simply state “man, you suck” if I missed a kill. If I went in solo and joined a random group I would often get kicked from the game, followed by a few nasty messages sent to my inbox. Once again, I found myself shying away from online gaming, soloing even in online games that were intended as squad games. I was speaking to a friend about this and he related to me this story:

> “Also, your experience with that particular gaming community— I just want to let you know that I played 1 round (of the game) last week and was the last person standing on attack. We didn’t know where the objective was and I didn’t find it before the end of the round. I got kicked from the game and received a few nasty messages as well. So I am not unfamiliar with that specific experience, although it’s not related to any disability of mine. I’m just not good at it and the people in that community are generally toxic”.

The only way that community will get better is if people decide to make it better. Don’t vote to kick people solely because they miss a key kill or lose a round you think they should have won. Don’t support toxic behavior, even from friends in party chat. Don’t remain silent while it’s going on, that silence implies that you support the toxic behavior.

We need to be better people and surround ourselves with better people.



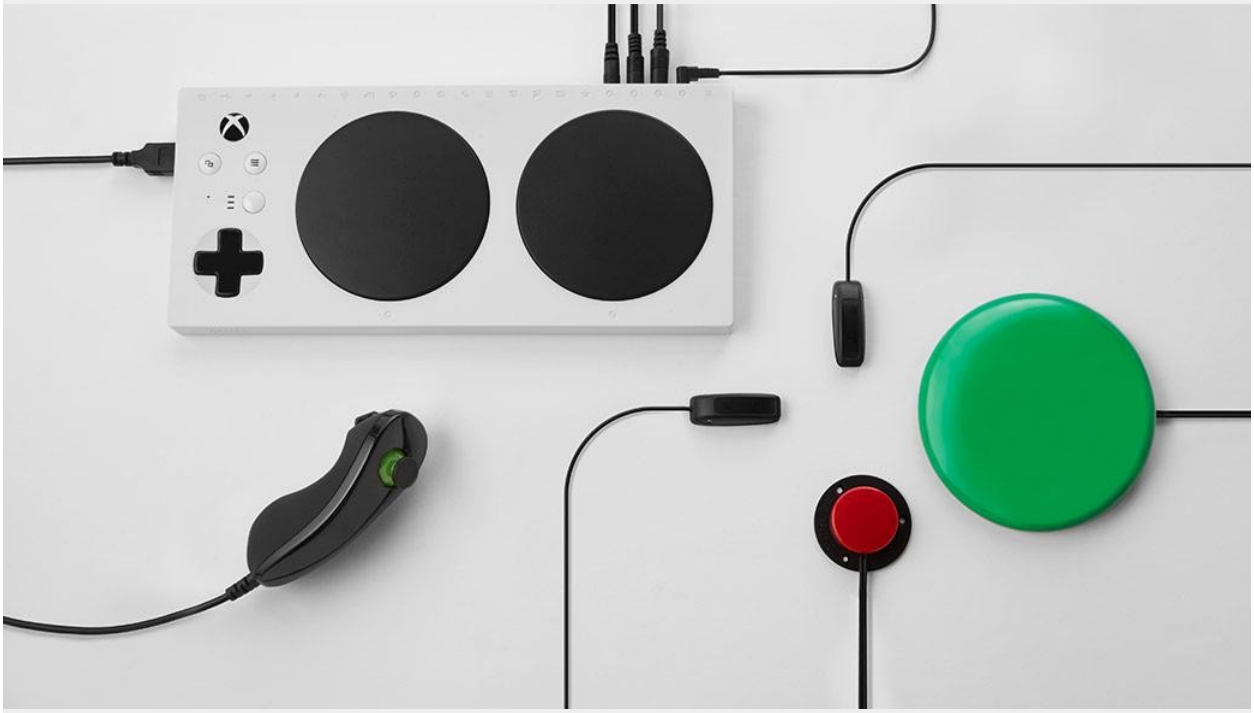
There are many gamers with many conditions that can affect or limit their ability to play a game or utilize certain aspects within that most gamers take for granted:

- If they are deaf or hard of hearing they may not hear audio cues, footsteps, changes in music, etc..
- Sight impaired may miss details that are small or certain color coded aspects in the game may be difficult for some.
- Speech impaired players may be unable to speak in party chat and they may not want to openly share that, they may simply say “mic broke” or the like. When you do “LFG Mic required” you may be shutting someone out.
- Motor control/dexterity issues can become evident in any number of ways such as slow/missed button pushes, difficulty with triggers on one or both sides, difficulty aiming or moving or a mixture of all of this.

Microsoft has been at the forefront of implementing and improving accessibility options not only on the console and the games they publish, but through their entire catalog of products, including developing new hardware peripherals to better enable gamers with disabilities to enjoy this hobby of ours.

In Spring of 2019 I signed up to be an Xbox Ambassador, I signed up because I like to help people and have a vast amount of gaming and technical knowledge with which I can draw upon. As I got involved with the program I learned it was much more than that.

They were stressing that “Gaming is for everyone”.



At the same time Microsoft, Xbox in particular, started to stress accessibility in gaming. They introduced the **Adaptive Controller**, an extremely customizable input device that opened up gaming for people who otherwise couldn’t play. They have also added accessibility features to the console including the ability to share a controller.

What makes the program extra special is the people.

The more I got involved in the forums, which were my initial focus for where I thought my skills were best suited, and the Discord channel, I started to get to know more and more people that were part of the program at all levels. Then I started watching the official Ambassador streams as well as some other Ambassadors’ personal channels.

The reason I bring that up is that through the program and those people I have opened myself up to playing online with others again, I have even started to stream on a regular basis and will let complete strangers join me. I could have never done that without my involvement with the Ambassadors.

I’m saying all that to basically say this:

To those with disabilities: Don’t worry about what other gamers think of your gameplay, they can’t see you, they don’t know you, and in response to any nasty notes you get, if you choose to reply, be polite and if you want to describe your limitations, do so. Make it an opportunity to open a dialogue. Heck, you might even make a friend. Surround yourself with people that support you and don’t judge you based on what you can’t do in a game.

To those without disabilities, don’t be toxic, don’t by default send nasty notes to people you feel cost you the match or whatever. You have no idea who the person behind the Gamertag is, if they have difficulties, or are new to the game, etc… if you see they are having issues, reach out, offer to help. Leaving a bad taste about gaming could drive them off, That should never be ok.

Someone once said “Lead, follow, or get out of the way.”

I don’t know about you, but I choose to lead.